



ANG

Bayan

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Editorial

Condemn US-Israeli aggression against Palestine!

The Communist Party of the Philippines and the Filipino people strongly condemn the criminal aggression of Israel in Gaza and the US' allout support for Israel. More than a thousand Palestinians have been killed, thousands injured and hundreds of thousands have suffered losses since Israel began its indiscriminate artillery attacks and invasion of Gaza. The attacks are the latest in a long list of crimes committed by Israel and the US against Palestine.

The hands of the expansionist Zionists and their US imperialist master have been tainted with blood for committing over half a century of genocidal campaigns and atrocities against the Palestinian people, for persistently invading, occupying and repressing Palestine and depriving the Palestinian people of their independence and most basic rights, and for treating them as prisoners in their own land.

Every repressive move that Israel has taken against Palestine has enjoyed the political, military and financial support of US imperialism. Despite the chorus of condemnation across the world, the US persists in defending Israeli aggression and repression and has countered moves by the United Nations and other international institutions to condemn Is-

rael's criminal attacks and repressive actions against Palestine.

The US has continuously provided military aid to Israel. The Israelis have used weapons supplied by the US in their heinous genocidal campaigns in Gaza. In exchange, Israel serves as the US' proxy in extending its hegemony and perpetrating its terrorist acts in the



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Middle East.

As much as Israel would like to continue with its direct occupation and campaign of devastation in Gaza, it has been forced to declare a ceasefire and retreat behind its borders with Gaza. It can not prolong its occupation of Gaza lest it face the intensified guerrilla warfare waged by the Palestinians and contend with growing international condemnation. Nevertheless, Israeli forces will continue to lay siege on and brutally attack Palestine from the outside and launch occasional blitzkrieg attacks on Gaza and other Palestinian territories.

The Palestinian people are completely justified in waging armed struggle to defend their territory and their right to self-determination against Israeli occupation, fascism and genocide. The Palestinian people have achieved victories many times through armed struggle, international diplomacy and negotiations, political work and people's actions. They still need to achieve total victory in their struggle for freedom, justice and peace.

The Communist Party of the



Philippines and all the revolutionary forces in the Philippines firmly support the Palestinian people in their struggle for national independence and to defend their land in the face of the devastation wrought by Zionist Israel and US imperialism.

Like the Palestinians, the Filipino people have been waging a

struggle for national and social liberation. If the Palestinian people confront US imperialism's foremost ally in the Middle East, the Filipino people on the other hand are fighting US imperialism's Number One puppet in Southeast Asia.

A massive global campaign must be carried out to further expose and condemn the arrogant collusion between the US and Israel against Palestine, and stop Israel from utilizing its military strength to reduce the Palestinian people to submission.

The revolutionary forces in the Philippines call on the Israeli people to act in solidarity with the Palestinian people and peoples of the world. It is their collective action that will prove decisive in ending the Zionist policies of the Israeli government and laying the ground for the attainment by the Palestinian people of complete independence and basic democratic rights. Only through this can the Israeli and Palestinian people enjoy peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and solidarity.

AB

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Criminal aggression in Gaza

More than 1,300 Palestinians have been killed, 5,600 injured and hundreds of thousands have lost their homes in Israel's latest criminal aggression in the Gaza Strip, Palestine, which began on December 27.

Amid widespread and intense international condemnation since the onset of the invasion, the Zionist Israelis have indiscriminately intensified their military campaign in Gaza. Israel launched up to 2,300 air strikes in Gaza in the first week alone. It relentlessly launched artillery and rocket attacks and rained bullets, unmindful of the targets: government buildings, houses, schools, markets, mosques and hospitals as well as tunnels and other means of transporting commodities.

Even evacuation centers, con-

were torched in these indiscriminate bombings.

To ensure massive burning and destruction of entire communities, Israeli troops used white phosphorus bombs whose use is strictly prohibited in areas where civilians are present.

Meanwhile, the growing condemnation of the world's peoples of the Israeli aggression continues to intensify. Since the latter end of December, hundreds of thousands have staged protests demanding immediate action from their governments against Israel. There were

worldwide protests in January, with the most massive ones held in the Middle East and in various European countries. Up to a million people protested in Syria on January 7 and the United Kingdom on January 10. Twenty thousand people launched demonstrations in Algeria on January 9; 15,000 in Qatar on January 10; and thousands more in various cities in The Netherlands, Greece, Turkey and Kenya. Rallies were also staged in cities across the US, in Malaysia and the Philippines.

On January 8, despite the US' counter moves, the UN Security Council was finally able to pass a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The UN Human Rights Council likewise filed a resolution before the UN General Assembly condemning Israeli viola-

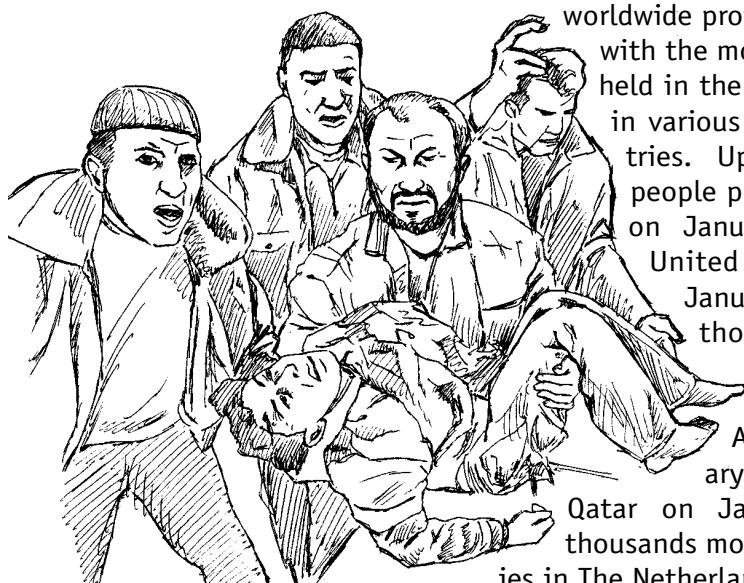
tions of international humanitarian law for its criminal actions and aggression in Gaza. Among these violations were indiscriminate bombings, the slaughter of civilians taking shelter at a UN headquarters in Gaza on January 15 and the deaths of two UNRWA staff and wounding of another on January 8 after Israeli forces fired at a UNRWA convoy bringing humanitarian aid to civilian victims in Gaza. Despite denials by Israel, there is sufficient evidence that the bombings were deliberate.

There are worldwide calls for a ceasefire between the Israelis and Hamas. Hamas officials have declared many times their readiness for an immediate ceasefire, in exchange for the pullout of Israeli troops in Gaza.

Israel declared a unilateral ceasefire only on January 17 purportedly after having achieved its objectives in attacking Gaza. It claimed to have inflicted massive casualties and severely impaired Hamas and destroyed its weapons.

In reality, Israel was forced to declare a ceasefire because it had become increasingly isolated by international public opinion, and it had become aware that it would have to face the growing wrath of the Palestinian people and the intensified attacks of armed patriotic groups in Palestine should Israeli troops continue to occupy Gaza. Hamas gave the Israeli forces only a week before the Palestinian fighters resume attacking all occupation forces within Gaza.

Contrary to Israel's public declarations, Hamas in fact remains intact and has even gained strength. It has not been defeated. It has grown stronger alongside the intensified fighting spirit of the Palestinian people.



voys of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) transporting humanitarian aid and a United Nations office have not been spared from Israeli bombardment. Most of the victims of these attacks were children, women and the elderly. Tons of food, medicines, blankets and other UNRWA supplies intended for the victims



Palestinians courageously wage resistance against Israelis

Israel's foremost goal in its bombardment of, and incursion into, Gaza is the total elimination of Hamas, a militant movement of the Palestinian people that advances armed struggle. Hamas won the 2006 parliamentary elections and now runs the government of Palestine. It is currently the main obstacle in Israel's objective of defeating and subjugating the Palestinian people and driving them away from Gaza.

Israel's claim that its acts of aggression are merely in retaliation for Hamas' rocket attacks from Gaza is a big lie. It accuses Hamas of violating the six-month ceasefire agreement forged in July 2008. But Hamas' attacks were limited retaliatory actions against earlier violations committed by Israel.

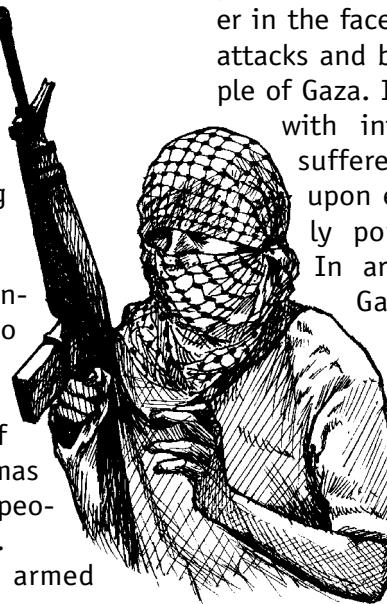
On November 4, Israel attacked and wiped out a Hamas unit on patrol in Gaza. It is Israel, in fact, that continuously violated the ceasefire. Contrary to the terms of the agreement, Israel never lifted the economic blockade it imposed along the borders of Gaza, which has resulted in the grave scarcity of food and medicines for the people living in the territory.

Israel has long been itching to invade Gaza in the face of the reported growth of Hamas' armed fighters. It seriously feared the implications of information it had obtained that Hamas' armed forces in Gaza had grown by more than 50% in the last year alone. Its firepower had also reportedly increased, including rocket launchers. Hamas had also reportedly enhanced its capability to launch sophisticated attacks.

Israel's goal in occupying Gaza is to cripple if not completely crush the growing strength of Hamas, destroy its arms caches, im-

pede the continued entry of weapons into Gaza and weaken the overall economy, quell the spirit of mass support for Hamas and the Palestinian people's overall struggle.

But Palestine's armed



patriotic forces have grown stronger in the face of Israel's intensified attacks and brutalities on the people of Gaza. Israeli forces were met with intense resistance and suffered major casualties upon entering Gaza's densely populated communities. In armed engagements in Gaza, the Palestinian people showed their growing determination to fight and crush the occupationist Zionist forces through widespread and intense guerrilla warfare. **AB**

Cuba marks 50th anniversary of its revolution

Cuba began celebrating on January 1 its 50 years of independence from the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. The celebration was led by President Raul Castro, 77, who succeeded Cuba's retired leader Fidel Castro.

The celebration, which lasted until January 8, culminated with the reenactment of the Revolutionary Army's victorious march from Santiago de Cuba to Havana, Cuba's capital.

Santiago de Cuba, a town in southeastern Cuba, is hailed as the place where the victory of the Cuban revolution began.

After overcoming the relentless suppression of ten US Presidents and attempts of mercenary Cuban traitors to invade the country (at the instigation of the US Central Intelligence Agency), Cuba now stands as one of the countries that have long been free from imperialist dictates. As a result of its takeover of foreign capitalist enterprises, then US Pres. John Kennedy imposed in 1962 an economic embargo against Cuba that continues to this day. Nevertheless, all 11 million Cubans persevered in their struggle, putting their faith in the revolution and overcoming any hardship that they encountered. The achievements they have earned in the fields of education, culture and science are at par or have even surpassed those of the world's wealthiest countries.

Backwardness in Eastern Visayas

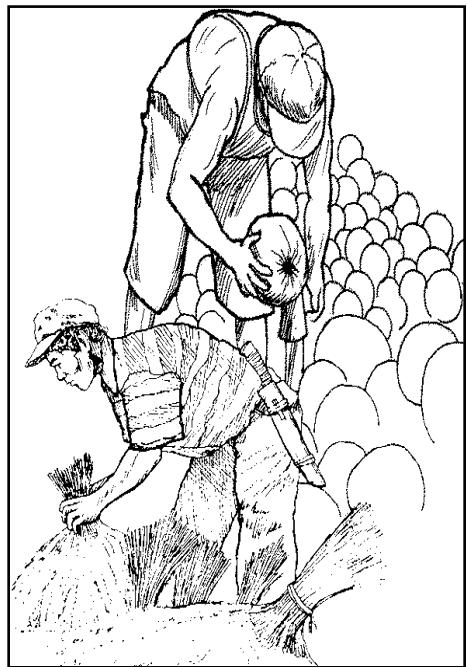
The following article is based on a statement issued by the CPP Regional Committee in Eastern Visayas on December 26, 2008.

The Eastern Visayan region is one of the poorest in the Philippines. Out of more than three million farmers living in the region, two million are agricultural workers, poor and lower middle peasants who earn less than ₱50 a day because they are landless or do not have enough land to till.

They continue to suffer different forms of exploitation such as high land rent and usury, low wages, high rent for farm animals, high prices of fertilizers, pesticides and seeds, depressed prices of agricultural products, soaring prices of commodities and exploitative transactions.

Majority of agricultural lands in the region are planted to com-

mercial export crops. Only one-fourth of the region's arable land is planted to rice and other food products. The already backward agricultural methods have deteriorated. The proportion of irrigated ricelands decreased from 35% in the 1990s to 17% at present. Most farmers do not even use machines or farm animals. Lands have been subdivided into even smaller par-



Tactical offensives in Samar

The New People's Army (NPA) in Samar province vigorously launched tactical offensives from October to December 2008. Following are accounts of tactical offensives not previously reported by *Ang Bayan*:

December 19. Red fighters of the Arnulfo Ortiz Command sniped elements of the 62nd IB in Barangay Sto. Niño, Motiong, Samar. It was 11 a.m. when the Red fighters targeted a platoon of the reactionary military conducting operations in the area, killing one soldier. For fear of further attacks, the soldiers used the village residents as human shields and ordered them to carry the dead soldier.

December 3. The Arnulfo Ortiz Command harassed the 62nd IB in Sitio Fernandez, Barangay Cataydunga, San Jose de Buan. The sniping operation disrupted the military operations of enemy soldiers in the area.

November 27. Red guerrillas of the Serafin Pacimos Command sniped elements of the 14th IB in Barangay Nawi, Paranas, causing the terrified soldiers to retreat immediately to their barracks.

November 13. Forces of the Serafin Pacimos Command harassed a platoon under the 14th IB in Sitio San Pedro, Purok 2, San Jose de Buan. After 40 minutes of wasting their bullets, the soldiers retreated in utter shame.

October 29. Two soldiers were killed and two others were injured in a harassment operation staged at around 9 a.m. by the Jorge Bolito Command against 18 soldiers under the command of Capt. Elmer Albor in Sitio Rizal, Barangay Bulao, Basey. A Red fighter was martyred in the assault.

cles. Agricultural production in the region is extremely inadequate to feed its population of 4.2 million. On the other hand, rice importation has increased nine times in the last decade, from 250,000 cavans in 1995 to over 2,000,000 cavans in 2008.

The region has no significant industries. Despite the growth in the number of business enterprises in the region from 10,000 in 1980 to 20,000 presently, only 17% of these are engaged in manufacturing (but are in reality involved only in semi-manufacturing). Ninety-eight percent of these firms employ 10 workers or less. Only a few employ more than 200 workers. Two of these companies, Philphos and PASAR, account for 91% of the region's exports. In past years, however, these firms reduced production due to lower demand from foreign markets.

The region has a combined unemployment and underemployment rate of 34.2% as of April 2008. Due to the lack of employment opportunities in the region,

the outmigration rate comes to 10%.

The plight of fisherfolk, workers, semi-workers and urban poor and rank-and-file local government employees is deplorable. The mandated daily minimum wage of ₱238 in the region's non-agricultural sector is insufficient, and worse, not even received by the majority. It is estimated that a family of six in the region needs ₱450 daily to live decently.

The quality of social services continues to deteriorate. Of more than 700,000 families in the region, 560,000 do not have potable water, 350,000 have no electricity and 350,000 are homeless. Less than 7,000 families have toilets. Ninety-nine percent of the population use wood, charcoal or kerosene as fuel. There are only 50 public hospitals in the region, with a ratio of one hospital bed for every 1,500 patients (50% lower than the World Health Organization [WHO] standard of one hospital bed for every 1,000 patients) and one doctor for every 10,000 population (only 10% of the WHO standard of one doctor for every 1,000 population). The region is also in dire need of additional teachers, schools and classrooms. Illiteracy is widespread.

More than ever, the dismal economic and political condition in the region is most favorable for waging revolution. The CPP in Eastern Visayas is confident that it would defeat Oplan Bantay Laya 2 and other counterrevolutionary schemes of the reactionary state in the region. Said the CPP-Eastern Visayas, "We are certain that from now on, (the Party) will be even more honed and stronger and that we can advance the revolutionary struggle to a new and higher level."

AB



NPA in Mindanao effectively uses indigenous weapons in waging people's war

The use of indigenous weapons in combination with modern firearms is one of the prominent characteristics of waging people's war. This way, the armed revolutionary movement is able to inflict maximum damage on the enemy by maximizing the masses' wealth of knowledge, limited resources and readily available materials.

Red fighters from Front 6 of the North Central Mindanao Region (NCMR) demonstrated this quality when they annihilated a column of fascist soldiers on May 30, 2008 using automatic rifles, explosives and *suyak* or punji sticks—sharpened wooden or bamboo stakes laid down as booby traps along their targets' possible path or areas of maneuver.

The soldiers were part of more than 200 elements of the 29th IB that descended on a cluster of barrios in San Fernando, Bukidnon. They had come from Panganutan town where they had been conducting military operations for two weeks. After keenly observing the movements of the reactionary troops, the NPA command identified which advancing column to ambush.

The NPA command positioned a platoon along the trail that the enemy was to take. The two enemy columns were expected to pass

through Kilometer 5, one from the east and another column from the west. Whichever column arrived first would be ambushed.

The Red fighters prepared 3,000 punji sticks which they planted along all possible areas where the enemy soldiers were expected to run for cover or jump after they had been fired upon. To camouflage the booby traps, the guerrillas covered the punji sticks with layers of stripped abaca fiber.

The different squads were strategically positioned in the front, middle and rear part of possible enemy routes. Squad Three's task was to pin down the enemy in its possible areas of maneuver after Squad Two, which was positioned in a foxhole, had fired at the soldiers. Simultaneously, Squad One was to position itself along a cliff on the side of the road, estimated to be about 100 feet deep.

The enemy's movements

turned out to be exactly as the NPA command had projected. The first column of government troops to arrive came from Barangay Ig-lugsad, from the east, and ran smack into the explosives, punji sticks and the guerrillas who were waiting in position.

The enemy at first hesitated to proceed because the area was a vast clearing. The troopers proceeded, however, when one of the soldiers assured them that the area was cleared of vegetation because it was where the locals stripped abaca fiber. They again stopped upon reaching a curve, and planned to send a scout to monitor the top of the hill, where Squad Two was positioned.

The Red fighters wasted no time. They immediately fired and lobbed explosives at the enemy. The stunned fascist military elements ran to seek cover. Some jumped over the cliff where the sharp and pointed bamboo sticks had been planted.

The firefight lasted for two hours, with almost all of the enemy soldiers downed. The military sent reinforcements who were too terrified to proceed to the ambush area and instead headed for another village.

Of the 16 enemy soldiers in the column, 15 were neutralized—12 were killed in the fire-fight while three others were wounded, leaving only one soldier who was able to run away because he happened to be at the end of the column.

Seized from the soldiers were two M203 grenade launchers, an M16 rifle, an M14, 560 rounds of ammunition for an M60 machine gun, 200 rounds of ammunition for an M16, cellphones, a communication radio and military equipment. The other firearms could no longer be taken as the place had been overcome by darkness. **AB**

Commercial banana plantations wreak havoc in Mindanao

The past decade has seen the aggressive expansion of banana plantations in Mindanao. Such expansion, however, has been accompanied by growing cases of landgrabbing. Land devoted to food production for the people's consumption and even of the peasants themselves has dwindled. As Mindanao's agriculture and economy had shifted to export crops over the years, the basis for developing self-sufficiency and attaining genuine development has further diminished.

Until the latter part of the 1980s, the island's more than 30 banana plantations have been confined to Davao del Norte. But since 1988, banana plantations have expanded to as far as Davao City, Davao del Sur, Compostela Valley, Agusan del Sur, Bukidnon and the provinces of Cotabato and Maguindanao.

The country is now the world's second biggest exporter of fresh bananas. It is the top supplier of bananas to Japan. The Philippines supplies 16% of the world's bananas, second only to Ecuador, which supplies 34%. In 2007, the country exported 1.905 million metric tons of bananas worth \$440 million or ₱18.1 billion (at an exchange rate \$1 = ₱41.14).

L a n d s
that used to
be planted to

coconut, coffee, vegetables, corn and rice have been converted to banana farms. One of the most glaring examples was the massive conversion of rice and corn lands in Cotabato's vast plains. What used to be hailed as the "food basket of Mindanao" is now host to the large plantations of Dole-Stanfilco, Lapanday's Global Fruits and



AJMR-Sumifru.

On the other hand, Digos, Davao del Sur which used to be known as the "home of vegetables and coffee" is now home to giant companies and plantations of highland banana. Even Mt. Apo, the Philippines' highest peak is being threatened by deforestation as a result of the expansion of lands planted to highland banana. Its neighboring forests are slowly being denuded because of this. The sight of Philippine Eagles soaring has now given way to the sight of cropdusters spraying pesticides on banana plantations every week.

Due to the complaints of affected communities against the destructive practices of banana companies, a number of local governments have already expressed concern over the situation. In November 2008, for instance, the local government of Magpet, North Cotabato lodged a formal complaint against AJMR, a company owned by the Sorianos, a business partner of Sumifru, because toxic chemicals seeping from its packing plants had found their way to the rivers of Barangay Datu Celo and Barangay Basak in the said town. Before this, in July 2007, the local government of Kidapawan had formed a team of experts to investigate the dumping of unused chemicals in the river.

Aside from the devastation brought about by toxic chemicals in rivers, affected communities have also become vulnerable to flash floods and landslides because of the widespread destruction of forests. As early as February 2006, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources had classified Makilala, North Cotabato as one of the areas most prone to floods and landslides due to almost a decade of banana farms expansion by Dole-Stanfilco. Since 1998, the company has continued to ex-

SWS: 52% of Filipinos consider themselves poor

Fifty-two percent (52%) or about 9.4 million Filipino families consider themselves poor, according to the Social Weather Stations (SWS) Fourth Quarter 2008 Survey. Meanwhile, 24% put themselves on the borderline, which means that about 76% of Filipino families endure different degrees of poverty. The highest poverty incidence could be found in Mindanao and the National Capital Region.

In the same survey, 42% of Filipino families or an estimated 7.7 million consider themselves as Food-Poor while 30% put themselves on the Food-Borderline.

The survey also indicates that poor families have been lowering their living standards. In Metro Manila, for instance, the median poverty threshhold stayed at ₱10,000 even though it had already come to as much as ₱15,000 several times in the past. The median poverty threshhold was down to ₱5,000 in Mindanao and ₱6,000 in the Visayas from the previous ₱10,000.

This also shows the extreme belt-tightening measures adopted by Filipino families amid the ever-worsening economic crisis.

The survey was conducted from November 28 to December 1, using face-to-face interviews of 1,500 adults in Metro Manila, Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao.

AB

pand towards the towns of Arakan, Antipas, Magpet and other interior towns of North Cotabato.

In Davao del Norte, the Tagum City Council has also conducted an investigation into the unauthorized conversion of rice farms in the city's outskirts to lands planted to Cavendish bananas by Dole-Philippines as Tagum's water supply would be affected. Dole-Stanfilco has, however, persisted with the expansion despite the destruction it will wreak on the area.

Who stands to gain? The massive destruction caused by the rapid expansion of banana plantations in the Philippines can only be blamed on the greed and the anti-people policies of the Arroyo regime. Because of the bankrupt regime's rapaciousness for the billions of dollars that it would allegedly earn from banana exports, since 2004, it had planned on providing more than 70,000 hectares to accommodate more banana

plantations.

Contrary to Arroyo's claims, it is not the Philippines but the agro-corporations in the country and their owners or their imperialist agribusiness company partners that stand to gain the most in the expansion of banana plantations. A study by the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development has revealed that countries producing and exporting bananas receive a measly \$0.11 for every dollar of banana sold. This means that thousands of farmers and agricultural workers receive mere crumbs compared to the billions of dollars of super profits amassed by the multi-national corporations.

More than the losses the country incurs, the expansion of banana plantations destroys the country's capacity to produce an adequate food supply for its own people and results in onslaughts on the environment, resources and the people's health.

AB

Landgrabbing in Aurora

Massive landgrabbing by the Angara clan and forced evacuations of residents from various towns are rampant in Aurora province amid the implementation of RA 9490 or the Aurora Special Economic Zone.

The Pambansang Katipunan ng mga Magbubukid chapter in Casiguran, Aurora reports that with the Angaras' clout in the province, it has been easy for them to legalize their landgrabbing activities at the urging of their huge foreign capitalist partners in connivance with the Arroyo regime.

The clan's most prominent member is Sen. Edgardo Angara, one of Gloria Arroyo's most rabid allies. His sister Bellaflor Angara-Castillo is governor of Aurora while his brother Arturo Angara is mayor of Baler, the provincial capital. On top of this, the congressman of the province Juan Edgardo Angara is the senator's son.

The authors of RA 9490 claim that the law aims to operationalize the Arroyo regime's Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan in Aurora. Using the deceptive buzzwords "development project," the Angaras executed this program immediately after its passage into law in January 2007 despite the lack of consultation with Aurora residents.

In order to implement the law, many residents have been threatened and actually evicted from

their homes and farms. This occurred during preparations for the construction of the seaport in Dingalan, the Coconut Dwarf Plantation in Dinalungan and the Aurora Special Economic Zone (ASEZA) in Barangays Bianoan, Estevez and Dibet in Casiguran.

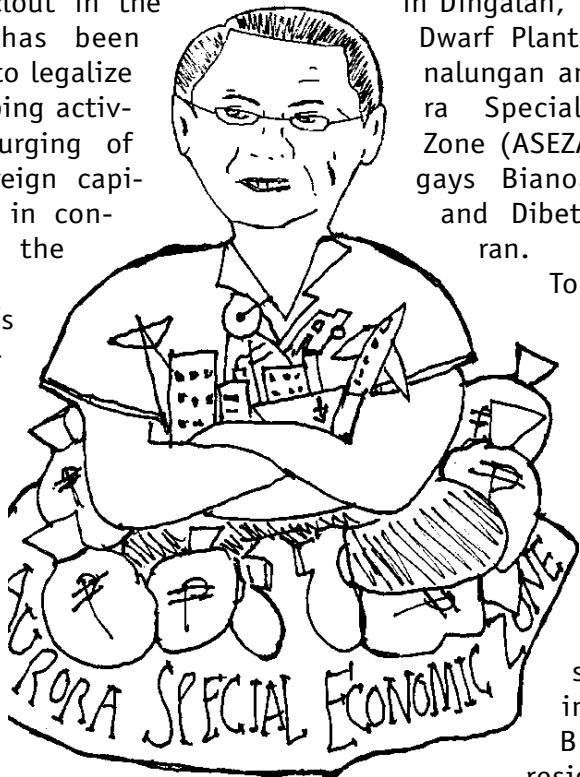
To mollify the families driven away from their homes, the provincial government allegedly sponsored housing projects. But affected residents were

banished instead to relocation sites that offered no livelihood opportunities. For instance, residents evicted from Casiguran as a result of the construction of ASEZA are set to be relocated to Tri-X, a far-flung forested area in Barangay Bianoan. To pacify the people, they were promised jobs from this project in exchange for the sustainable livelihood they derive from tilling their lands.

Residents who oppose or refuse to comply with the Angaras' wishes and see through their empty promises face the clan's fascist machinery for swift eviction, the 48th IB of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the forces of the Philippine National Police in the province.

The people of Aurora continue to oppose the antipeople ASEZA because they are aware of the destruction it will bring and the added misery they will have to endure as only the Angara dynasty, its big foreign capitalist partners and the Arroyo clique stand to benefit from this project.

AB



Protests against ASEZA

More than 1,500 farmers, fisherfolk and Dumagat tribespeople staged a protest caravan in Casiguran, Aurora on January 19 to oppose the construction of the Aurora Special Economic Zone (ASEZA) in their town. Affected barangays include Esteves, Dibet, Dibacong, Bianoan and Calabgan. More than 6,400 people will be evicted because of the project.

The protesters, who boarded hand tractors and tricycles, gathered at the Casiguran municipal hall and called on local government officials to immediately put a stop to the establishment of ASEZA.

They argued that the targeted areas for ASEZA are all private rice lands, and are in fact hailed as the rice granary of the towns of Dinalungan, Casiguran and Dilasag. All the lands in question are irrigated.

The protesters also denounced the absence of consultation between the people and the local government with regard to the project.

AB



Illegal arrests, abductions, repression and food blockades

The latest cases of human rights abuses gathered by *Ang Bayan* include the illegal arrest of a Red commander on medical leave, the abduction of a suspected Red fighter from a hospital, harassment committed by the Presidential Security Group on three churchpeople and the continuing imposition of a food blockade against the MILF and civilians in a North Cotabato town. Military abuses were also reported to be rampant in the Samar countryside.

January 19. Elements of the AFP Eastern Mindanao Command illegally arrested Regenaldo Alicaba Sr. and his daughter Rizalyn Manguilumutan. Alicaba, who is currently on medical leave was arrested without a warrant in his daughter Rizalyn's house in Purok 3, Barangay Cogon, Panabo City. Rizalyn, on the other hand, was accused of being a member of the New People's Army (NPA) although she is a civilian. The NPA Armando Dumandan Command demanded that Rizalyn be released, Alicaba surfaced and his rights as a prisoner-of-war respected.

January 8. Military agents in plain clothes and elements from the Manila Police District (MPD) forcibly took a female patient from the Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Sta. Mesa, Manila. The abductors claimed that Myrna Bautista, 22, is an NPA fighter who was wounded in an encounter between the NPA and PNP in Rodriguez, Rizal. Her cousin, however, said that the victim's stomach wound was caused by a stray bullet fired from a group of



drunks involved in a scuffle in their town of Silang, Cavite. The patient has been on hospital arrest since January 3 and has been under close guard by the police.

The military agents handcuffed and made two hospital guards kneel when the latter refused to allow them to take the patient without having duly signed her discharge documents. Bautista and the two guards were forced into a van that was part of a convoy of eight vehicles.

January 6. Elements of the Presidential Security Group (PSG) apprehended and ordered three church workers to strip off their T-shirts before a scheduled visit by Gloria Arroyo at a parish in San Jose, Midsalip, Zamboanga del Sur. Fr. Raymundo Ugwu, San Jose parish priest recounted that PSG operatives ordered the three church workers to remove their T-shirts bearing the slogan "Stop Mining and Corruption".

Arroyo later cancelled her visit

to San Jose for undisclosed reasons. Fr. Ugwu had intended to bring to Arroyo's attention the people's concerns over the environmental destruction wrought by mining companies in the area.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines strongly assailed the abusive actions of Arroyo's bodyguards.

December 28 to present. Elements of the 68th IB imposed a blockade on food and other basic needs in Alamada, North Cotabato after a firefight ensued between Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) guerrillas and the Philippine Army on the evening of December 24 that led to the death and wounding of a number of soldiers. Among those deprived of food by the 68th IB were at least 400 families that had fled their homes to escape the intense fighting and had sought refuge in evacuation centers. The soldiers also ban residents of Barangay Palepain in Alamada from returning home, claiming that the MILF guerrillas involved in the encounter had set up camps in the village.

December 17-20. At least ten families were forced to flee Barangay San Nicolas, San Jose de Buan, Samar due to military operations launched by 48 soldiers of the 14th IB. The government troops threatened barangay captain Virginia Labong, who was forced to evacuate towards Catbalogan. Another farmer could no longer go back home because he was being hunted by the military and his family threatened.

In Sitio Fernandez, Barangay

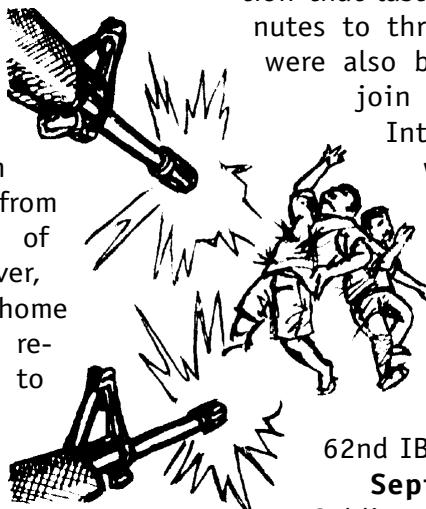


Cataydungan in the same town, a carabao was hit when soldiers conducting military operations in the area fired indiscriminately on December 20.

December 3. Soldiers of the 14th IB arrested and tortured former barangay captain Berting Jabolan, 47, a resident of Barangay Hiduruma, San Jose de Buan as he and his family were harvesting corn. The military elements accused him of being an NPA member. They covered his nose with plastic and punched him in the stomach while forcing water down his throat. The following morning, Jabolan was able to escape from his captors. Because of his experience, however, he has not returned home and his whereabouts remain unknown even to his family.

November 29. Soldiers on operation strafed the house of Roni Impon in Barangay Carolina, Matuguinao, Samar while 11 persons, most of them children, were inside. They even lobbed a grenade at the house using an M203, wounding Impon's son Roque. Not content, the military also destroyed their crops and looted their house.

November 19. Soldiers cold-bloodedly murdered farmers Orlando and Intoy Bartolo in Barangay Libertad, Matuguinao. Intoy was able to fight back and managed to injure a soldier, slash the hands of another trooper and smash the teeth of a third one. The government troopers also captured and forced Botoy Opiniano and Takoy Cailo, both farmers, to guide them in their mili-



tary operations.

November 15-16. Military elements forced residents and officials of Barangay Hagbay, San Jose de Buan to "surrender" and accused them of being NPA members. Among the so-called "surrenderees" were Jose Labong, 35, barangay captain; Jason Gabin, 23, barangay councilor; Leonila Labong, 27, councilor; Jonito Labong, 25, councilor; and Janyboy Llantos, 23. The victims were subjected to intense interrogation that lasted from 45 minutes to three hours. They were also being forced to join the Barangay Intelligence Network (BIN) set up by soldiers under the command of 2Lt. Jayhardes Bagongera of the 62nd IB Bravo Coy.

September 21. Soldiers arrested in Sitio Galutan, Barangay Can-aponte, San Jose de Buan Conrado Fabella, 40, and his wife Nenita, 28, while they were harvesting rice. Also arrested were their daughter Lea, 15, and Armando Pacheco, 28, a young man who was helping out in the harvest. Pachelo was beaten and forced to admit that he was hiding a gun. The soldiers took his shirt off and threatened to stab him. They then ordered the victims to run as fast as they could. For fear of being shot, Nenita lost consciousness.

The Fabella family's farm had also been bombed by the military on September 16-18, causing damage to their crops worth to ₱2,300.

WB bans Mike Arroyo's company from projects

THE World Bank (WB) has permanently banned a company believed to be owned by Mike Arroyo from being involved in any of its projects because of corruption. Also banned by the WB for a number of years were two other Filipino companies after the WB discovered that they and four Chinese companies colluded in bidding for a World Bank construction project.

An investigation by the Integrity Vice Presidency, a WB agency that monitors fraud and corruption in bank projects revealed that E.C. de Luna Construction Corp. and its purported owner Eduardo C. de Luna are part of a big cartel of local and foreign companies that submitted bids for the Philippines National Roads Improvement and Management Program or NRIMP 1. After discovering the collusion, the WB cancelled its \$33-million road project.

Eduardo C. de Luna is a known crony of Mike Arroyo and is believed to be his dummy at E.C. de Luna Construction Corporation.

Malacañang refused to abide by the World Bank ruling and even challenged the bank to present evidence of the companies' involvement in corruption. It refused to ban the companies from government projects and charge them in court.

AB

Growing opposition to 2009 US-RP Balikatan in Bicol

THE US-RP Balikatan Exercises' real objective is to survey the country's terrain on land and sea and to conduct surveillance against the revolutionary movement, said National Democratic Front-Bicol spokesperson Ka Greg Bañares. He strongly belied claims by the Arroyo regime and the US military that soldiers joining Balikatan would concentrate on "humanitarian missions." The military exercises will be held this April in Albay, Sorsogon and Masbate provinces.

Bañares said Balikatan is a form of US military intervention in the Philippines and raises the level of civil war in the country. In this regard, the Communist Party of the Philippines has ordered all units of the New People's Army to launch numerous tactical offensives in areas covered by the military exercises.

Reynaldo Habagbag, spokesperson of the Sorsogon United Movement against Balikatan para sa Kapayapaan (Sumaba Ka) has reported that the first group from the US Army arrived in Sorsogon on January 7. A smaller group from this batch has already inspected the projected site of the military exercises, particularly the towns of Juban and Irosin.

Meanwhile, more personalities have opposed Balikatan's launching. The latest to assail it is Bishop Lucio Quiambao of the Diocese of Legaspi City who called on the governors of the region's six provinces not to allow the conduct of the joint military exercises in the region as it would bring nothing but the spread of prostitution and the abuse of Filipinas. Sister Ailyn Binco of the Religious of the

Good Shepherd assented to this, saying that they did not want a repeat of the abuse by American soldiers of "Nicole" in Olongapo City.

Prior to this, Rep. Luz Ilagan of the Gabriela Women's Party called for the cancellation of the annual Balikatan as it brings nothing but human rights abuses. The progressive lawmaker cited cases of abuse by American soldiers in Mindanao, such as the wounding of Arsid Baharun by US

soldiers in Zamboanga City in 2004 who were on a "test mission." Bizma Juhan, on the other hand, was hit by shrapnel from a bomb that detonated in Indanan, Sulu in 2006. No one took responsibility for their injuries as US troops are not covered by Philippine law.

Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights chair Sen. Francis Escudero also expressed doubt about Balikatan's avowed objectives.

SC unearths plot to oust Chief Justice Puno

MALACAÑANG'S maneuverings to oust Chief Justice Reynato Puno from the Supreme Court recently came to the fore. The pretext for such a move was to have been the court's alleged inaction on a motion to disqualify Rep. Jocelyn Limkaichong who has purportedly been proven to be a Chinese citizen. Limkaichong had defeated Olivia Paras, wife of Jacinto Paras, one of Arroyo's loyal partymates at the Kabalikat ng Mamamayang Pilipino (Kampi) in the 2007 elections.

The ouster of the chief justice was to have been kicked off by privilege speeches from Arroyo's minions in Congress on January 19 and calls for his impeachment. But the Supreme Court had caught on early enough and nipped the plot in the bud by disclosing it to the public early in the game.

Malacañang's maneuvers against Puno are grounded on Arroyo's attempts to brush aside all obstacles to her drive for a constituent assembly (con-ass) as a means of amending the constitution. The Arroyo clique is keen on con-ass despite the Senate's objections. Puno is expected to oppose such plans once the issue of con-ass is brought before the Supreme Court.

Arroyo is set to appoint seven new Supreme Court justices in place of those who are scheduled to retire this year. After 2009, Puno will be the only remaining justice who is not an Arroyo appointee.

Arroyo has never been able to control Puno. He has consistently taken stands against many attempts by Malacañang to distort the law and even in many instances where the Arroyo regime had violated human rights and committed miscarriages of justice.

Should Puno be ousted before his scheduled retirement in May 2010, there will be no stopping Arroyo from promptly appointing her own stooge as chief justice. She will thus gain absolute control of the Supreme Court and find it easy to implement cha-cha.